

1854

Kyerson, A. E.

Scriptural rights of the
members of Christ's visible
church.

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SCRIPTURAL RIGHTS

OF THE MEMBERS OF

CHRIST'S VISIBLE CHURCH:

OR,

CORRESPONDENCE CONTAINING THE REASONS

OF

DR. RYERSON'S RESIGNATION

OF OFFICE IN THE

WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH.

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The Rights of the Christian are no less Sacred than those of the Citizen.  
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"The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to Salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation"—*Fifth Article of Faith in the Doctrines and Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.*  
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CHRIST'S VISIBLE CHURCH

DR. WATSON'S RESIGNATION

NEW-YORK METHODIST CHURCH

EXPLANATORY PREFACE.

THE present pamphlet would not have appeared, had the request contained in the following note been complied with—a note addressed to the President, and read by him to the Conference:—

(COPY)

TUESDAY MORNING,
June 13th, 1854.

MY DEAR SIR,—

I herewith enclose you the draft of an Address to the Governor General in favour of Victoria College.

In regard to the publication in the *Guardian* of the documents which were read to the Conference yesterday, I do not intend to discuss the questions to which they refer, or to reply to anything that may be said on the subject—having done what I believe to be my duty in regard to it. But I should wish the Church to know the reasons which have influenced me on this occasion—especially as I believe them to be both Wesleyan and Scriptural. As I have for thirty years contributed to all the funds of the preachers and Church, without receiving or expecting to receive a farthing from them; and from the period and kinds of labours I have performed in the Church, and from my wish to live in connexion with it, I think my letters of resignation might at least not be withheld from the members of our Church. If any expense attend the publication of the correspondence between us, I will defray every farthing of it.

I do not think any other member of the Conference is called upon to do as I have done—my circumstances being peculiar. But I do not wish to be wronged and blackened by misrepresentations; I only desire that my brethren and old friends through the land may be permitted and enabled to read my own reasons and views on this the last occasion of my official intercourse with them.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) E. RYERSON.

The Reverend ENOCH WOOD,

President of the Conference.

I have been informed that a majority of the Conference decided that I was not entitled to any such consideration,* nor the members of the Church to any such information, as is referred to in the foregoing note, although (as I have been told) the President, the Rev. William Ryerson and other members maintained that it was only just to me and due to the members of the Church, that the correspondence in question should be laid before them.

The present Editor of the *Christian Guardian* has shown much zeal of late against the priesthood of the Church of Rome, because, among other things, it dreads free discussion—refuses to its followers the right and means of reading both sides of a question, and judging for themselves—and rules by its own decrees, and not by reason or revelation. But how promptly, though strangely, does the Editor of the *Guardian* and others cherishing the same feelings in regard to myself and the subjects of the following correspondence, imitate the deprecated Papal example in respect to what involves the scriptural rights and privileges of the baptized youth of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, as well as of her adult members and devout adherents!

* I have understood, nevertheless, that a resolution was adopted expressing the sense of the Conference as to my past labours in the Church; but the publication of it has been suppressed in the official Organ, as also in the printed Minutes, of the Conference.

The Correspondence in the subsequent pages shows with what feelings and sentiments I retired from the councils of the Conference; and I could not have supposed that any members of that body were capable of excluding from the public records of its proceedings what the Conference had deemed a bare act of justice to an individual who had laboured nearly thirty years in connexion with it, and often performed most difficult services and labours in its behalf. Such a proceeding will reflect more dishonour upon its authors than upon me, in the judgment of every honourable and Christian mind in Upper Canada, of whatever persuasion or party. I am happy to believe that this poor imitation of the system of the "Index Expurgatorius" cannot blot from the memories of an older generation in the Church recollections of labours and struggles of which the expurgators know nothing but the fruits—among which are the civil and religious privileges they enjoy.

I have also been credibly informed that, while the real grounds of my resignation and the judgment of the Conference upon my conduct and labours during many years connexion with it, are withheld from the Wesleyan public, insinuations are circulated, that my resignation has been dictated by ulterior political objects—an idea which I have never for one moment entertained, and which is foreign, as far as I know, to the thoughts of every public man in Canada.

A more vitally important and deeply affecting subject can scarcely be laid before the Wesleyan community ; but in order to present it to the pious judgment of that body at large, I have had no other alternative than to assume the position I now sustain—otherwise being compelled to observe, as in past years, a strict silence beyond the walls of the Conference Room. But from what I have witnessed and heard in that room, I appeal to the calm consideration of the intelligent and devout members of the Wesleyan Church, either in their closets with their Bible before them, or at their firesides with their children around them. Whether I have or have not overrated the importance of the question, I leave every one to decide, after reading the following correspondence. It will be seen that the question is not one of a personal nature—is not one which ought to excite any unkind feeling between persons who may take different views of it. The question is as to whether, on the Wesleyan Conference assuming the position and functions of a distinct and independent Church, a condition of membership has not been imposed which is a departure from the principles of Mr. Wesley and the doctrine and practice of the Apostolic and Primitive Church—a condition which ignores the church relation, rights and privileges of the baptized children of the Wesleyan body, and excludes thousands from its membership upon un-scriptural and un-Wesleyan grounds. It will be seen by an extract on page 20, that Mr. Wesley's disciplinary object in giving quarterly tickets, was “to separate the precious from the vile,” “to remove any *disorderly* member ;” but in vain have I sought for an instance of Mr. Wesley ever excluding, even from his private societies in a Church, an upright and orderly member for mere non-attendance at class-meeting. That, however, he might have consistently done in a society in a church, if he had thought it expedient to do so, as it would not have affected the membership of any parties in the Church to which they belonged. The three paragraphs of our Discipline, containing three sentences, against which I protest, had no place in the large Minutes of Conference finally revised and printed by Mr. Wesley the year of his death ; nor do they exist in the Minutes of the British Conference to this day. From what is therefore modern and unauthorized by Scripture, by the practice of the primitive Church, or by Mr. Wesley, I go back to first principles, and say, as did Mr. Wes-

ley to Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury, when he sent them to organize the Societies in America into a church, let us "simply follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."

It is often said that "nobody objects to attending class-meeting except those who have no religion." Persons who thus judge of others show more of the Pharisaical, than of the Christian, spirit, and evince but little of the "wisdom that cometh from above," in thus "measuring others by themselves." The following correspondence shows that I am second to none in my appreciation of the value and usefulness of class-meetings; but I have had too much experience not to know, that the best talkers in a class-meeting are not always the best livers in the world; and I attach less importance to what a person may say of himself in a class-meeting, than to uprightness in his dealings, integrity in his word, meekness in his temper, charity in his spirit, liberality in his contributions, blamelessness in his life. Doings, rather than sayings, are the rule of Divine judgment. A few years since, a poor woman in Edinburgh applied to the Rev. Dr. B. for a *token* of admission to the Lord's Supper. Dr. B. commenced examining her as to her knowledge and fitness for the holy sacrament, by proposing several theological questions, not one of which the poor woman, in her fear and trembling, could answer. She was informed that she was not qualified for admission to such an ordinance; but on going out of the door, she turned, her eyes filled with tears, and with a look that language cannot describe, she said, "Sir, if I canna' *talk* for my Saviour, I can *die* for Him." The learned and pious divine, struck with the unreasonableness of his own test and mode of procedure, recalled the poor woman, gave her the desired token, blessing her in the name of the Lord. The most trustworthy, the most considerate, the most deeply impressed and affected with religious truth, are often the most retiring, the most diffident of themselves, the least willing to speak of themselves, though willing to do and suffer for Christ, if not to die for him; yet, if they cannot stand the talking test of the class-meeting, they must be rejected from the visible Church of Christ! This is one of the many instances recorded in history, of that which is good in its prudential design and place, being gradually perverted from its original purpose and application, and at length invested with more than the authority of a papal decree—is made an absolute condition

of membership in the visible Body of Christ, though pretending to nothing of the kind in its origin and design. The subject has doubtless engaged the serious attention of hundreds and thousands; but each one has perhaps been apprehensive of being charged with heresy did he venture to doubt the Divine authority of what existed by common consent; and few have been prepared to incur the responsibility and sacrifice necessary to call it in question in a public and official manner.

It may not be improper for me to observe, that there are ministers who loudly advocate attendance at class-meeting as a church-law, and yet do not observe that law themselves perhaps once a year, much less habitually, as they insist in respect to private members; and the most strenuous of such advocates pay no heed to the equally positive prohibitions and requirements of the discipline in several other respects, especially in regard to band-meetings, which were designed, as the discipline expressly states, "to obey that command of God, 'confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.'" I am far from intimating, or believing, that there are many advocates of class-meeting tests of this description. But history shows, from our Lord to the present time, that the most vehement advocates for the "mint, annise and cummin" of particular tests and forms, are not proportionably zealous for the "weightier matters of the law." It is easier for men to impose and enforce law upon others, than to observe it themselves. But when a man's words and actions contradict each other, the argument of his actions is the more forcible, as well as the more honest and sincere.

It has likewise been alleged, that if attendance at class-meeting be not made a church-law, and the capital punishment of expulsion be not attached to its violation, class-meetings will fall into disuse. I answer, this is beside the question. The question is, whether there is such a law in the Bible? Has our Lord or His Apostles given authority to any conclave or conference to make such a law? Our Lord and the Apostles knew better than their followers what was essential to membership in the Christian Church, as well as what was essential to its existence and prosperity. I may also observe, that if the existence of class-meetings cannot be maintained except by the terror of the scorpion-whip, or rather executioner's

sword, of expulsion from the church, it says little for them as a *privilege*, or place of delightful and joyous resort. My own conviction is, that if class-meetings, like love-feasts, were maintained and recommended as a *privilege* and useful means of religious edification, and not as a law, the observance of which is necessary to membership in the visible church of Christ, but made voluntary, like joining the Missionary Society, class-meetings would be more efficient and useful than they are now, and attendance at them would be more cordial and profitable, if not as, or even more, general. But what might be or not be in any supposed case, is foreign to a question as to what is enjoined in the law and testimony of the Holy Scriptures as essential to discipleship with Christ.

It is well known that meeting in class by a large portion of the members of the Wesleyan Church, is very irregular—that their absence from class-meeting is the general rule of their practice, and their attendance the exception. Yet, such persons are not excluded, as it would involve the expulsion of the greater part of the members of the body, including several of its ministers. It is, therefore, so much the more objectionable, and so much the more wrong, to have a rule which ignores at one sweep the membership of all the baptized children of the body, which sends and keeps away the conscientious and straightforward, who would not think of joining a religious community without intending *habitually* to observe all its rules, and yet after all, *habitually* disregarded by a large portion of both preachers and people, and is made, as far as my observation goes, an instrument of gratifying individual hostility, rather than a means of promoting the religious and moral ends of Christian discipline.

It is, however, the bearing of this question upon the relationship and destinies of the youth of the Wesleyan body that has most deeply impressed and affected my own mind, as may be inferred from the following correspondence. It requires less scriptural zeal and an inferior order of qualifications, and it is much more exciting and easy, to minister or attend at special meetings and in the ordinary public services of the church, than to pursue “in season and out of season” the less conspicuous and more detailed labour of teaching and training up children and youth in the knowledge and experience of the doctrines of Christ, and thus secure them to the church, and to the Saviour, and secure to them the “godliness which has the

promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”* And what is the result of the general adoption (with a few fine exceptions,) of the former in preference to the latter—instead of the

* Of the utter insufficiency of public ministrations alone, even for grown up Christians, much more for children, Mr. Wesley thus speaks in his large and authorized Minutes of Conference:—“For what avails public preaching alone, though we could preach like angels? We must, yea, every travelling preacher must, instruct them from house to house. Till this is done, and that in good earnest, the Methodists will be little better than other people. Our religion is not deep, universal, uniform; but superficial, partial, uneven. It will be so, till we spend half as much time in this visiting, as we now do in talking uselessly.” “For, after all our preaching, many of our people are almost as ignorant as if they had never heard the gospel. I speak as plain as I can, yet I frequently meet with those who have been my hearers many years, who know not whether Christ be God or man. And how few are there who know the nature of repentance, faith and holiness. Most of them have a sort of confidence that God will save them, while the world has their hearts. I have found by experience, that one of these has learned more from one hour’s close discourse, than from ten years’ public preaching.” “Let every preacher having a catalogue of those in each society, go to each house. Deal gently with them, that the report of it may move others to desire your coming. Give the children the instructions for children, and encourage them to get them by heart. Indeed, you will find it no easy matter to teach the ignorant the principles of religion. So true is the remark of Archbishop Usher—‘Great scholars may think this work beneath them. But they should consider, the laying the foundation skilfully, as it is of the greatest importance, so it is the masterpiece of the wisest builder. And let the wisest of us all try, whenever we please, we shall find that to lay this ground-work rightly, to make the ignorant understand the grounds of religion, will put us to all our skill.’” “Unless we take care of the rising generation, the present revival will be *res unius aetatis* [a thing of one generation;] it will last only the age of a man.”

There are several ministers who earnestly labour in the spirit of these extracts from Mr. Wesley’s Minutes of Conference—printed the year of his death. But their labours are the promptings of individual zeal and intelligence, and not dictated or backed by the authoritative example of the ministry and church at large, or the recognition of the church relations of the interesting subjects of their instructions. The effect of the general disuse or neglect of systematic individual instruction of children, not speaking of such instruction of adult members, and reliance upon public ministrations and meetings alone, must be, instability of religious profession, want of clear and accurate views of the grounds, doctrines, nature, institutions and duties of religion, indifference to all religion, or wandering from denomination to denomination according to circumstances or caprice; but in all cases the loss to the Wesleyan Church of the greater part of the harvest which she should and might gather into the garner of Christ.

union of both? It is the humiliating and most painful fact that the great majority of Methodist youth are lost to the Church, if not lost to Christ and to heaven—that in a large proportion of instances, Methodism is not perpetuated to the second generation of the same family—that in the great majority of instances it is only so perpetuated very partially; and in very few instances to all the children of Methodist parents; while there is each year the conversion of only a few hundreds, or thousands, mostly from without. The return of prodigals, and the accession of strangers and aliens to the body, are indeed causes of thankfulness and rejoicing; but prevention is better than cure—piety from childhood is better than reformation in manhood. The judgment of the Apostle upon him “who neglects to provide for his own house,” even in temporal matters, is well known; and must there not be a radical defect and wrong in any religious organization which loses the great majority of its own youth, and depends largely on infusions from without for the recruit of its numbers? Such an organization may do much good, and widely extend in many places for the time being, especially in a new and unsettled state of society; but the vital element of permanent strength and lasting prosperity is wanting, where, by its repulsion or neglect, the great majority of its baptized youth are alienated from, and lost to its communion. It is not in the promise of God, or in the genius of Scriptural Christianity, that “children trained up in the way that they should go,” will, in many instances, much less generally, depart from it in after years.

I confess and bear my full share of responsibility and shame for the facts thus referred to. I have repeatedly addressed the Conference on the subject. In June, 1852, I proposed the adoption of a catechism which I thought calculated to assist in arresting the progress of the evil. It was not assented to. In June, 1853, I again submitted to the Conference a series of resolutions recognizing the church relationship and privileges of baptized children and the duties of the church to them, and submitted a draft of catechism designed to give practical effect to the rights and obligations thus acknowledged. The resolutions were agreed to; the draft of catechism was referred to a committee, and approved of by it, and was reported to the Conference; but the Conference refused to adopt it, partly upon the ground that Wesleyan ministers in Lower

Canada would in 1854 be connected with those in Upper Canada, and ought to have a voice in respect to it; yet ordered it to be printed for consideration at the next Conference. Upon the same ground I thought it advisable to forego until this year, what I had intended and prepared to do in June 1853—namely, to bring before the Conference for final decision, the principal subject of the following correspondence. On the first day of the Conference in June of the current year, the printed draft of the proposed catechism was put into the hands of the members, and notice was given of the resolutions on pages 24, 25; the resolutions were rejected, and I understand the proposed catechism has been dropt in silence. The religious hopes of parents and the prospects of the children and youth of the Wesleyan body, are thus little, if at all improved. But if the publication of these pages shall prove the occasion of arresting or checking this retrograde and patricidal course of things, and of awakening the ministry and members of the Wesleyan Church, in any degree, to a sense of the relationship and claims of her children, I shall feel myself amply compensated for the sacrifice and obloquy I have incurred, and shall be among the first to hail the ushering in of a new era, and to do what I can to diffuse its blessings and triumphs.

In conclusion, I will add a word or two of explanation of a personal nature, although I hope the subjects referred to in the following correspondence will be considered without respect to persons. Impressed with the magnitude of the wrongs and evils above referred to, dreading personal collision in the Conference, anticipating but little success from it, and feeling uncertain as to how few were likely to be the days of my earthly career, and believing that a special duty was imposed upon me in this respect by Providential circumstances, I addressed to the President of the Conference, the 2nd of January, the first letter of the following correspondence, as the most likely means, without collision with any person or body, to draw practical attention to the subject, on the part of both the ministry and laity of the Church. In deference to the views and recommendations of the President, I consented to suspend my resignation, and bring the subject once more before the Conference. But the fears and apprehensions I expressed in January last, have been fully realized, and the Conference Organ has suppressed even the short resolutions

which I proposed, or the slightest mention of the grounds of my resignation, while rapid private misrepresentation has gone forth far and wide among the members of the body, as to my views, motives, and intentions. This, however, has been the course adopted in all ages and countries by persons who have asserted the sufficiency of clerical authority and things as they are, resisted the reform of abuses and the correction of evils, and dreaded and opposed free discussion. I have, however, the satisfaction of knowing that, if the first efforts of my pen, after joining the Conference in 1825, were to advocate the right of the members of the Church to hold a bit of ground in which to bury their dead, and the right of its ministers to perform the marriage service for the members of their congregations, my last efforts in connexion with the Conference have been directed to obtain the rights of Christian citizenship to the baptized children and exemplary adherents of the Church. While I maintain that each child in the land has a right to such an education as will fit him for his duties as a citizen of the state, and that the obligations of the state correspond to the rights of the child, so I maintain, upon still stronger and higher grounds, that each child baptized by the Church is thereby enfranchised with the rights and privileges of citizenship in it, until he forfeits them by personal misconduct and exclusion, and that the obligations of the Church correspond to the rights of the child. I also maintain that each member of Christ's visible Church, has a scriptural right to his membership in it as long as he keeps the "commandments and ordinances of God," whether he attends or does not attend a meeting which Mr. WESLEY, (who instituted it,) declared to be "merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution," and for not attending which he never excluded, or presumed to authorise excluding, a person from church membership. It is a principle of St. Paul, in the 14th chapter of Romans, of all true Protestantism, as well as of the writings of Mr. Wesley, "*in necessary things unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.*"

Toronto, July 6, 1854.

E. RYERSON.

P. S. It is proper to state, that the letters of the President of the Conference contained in the following correspondence, are published with his consent; and it is a gratifying duty for me to acknowledge his Christian and gentlemanly treatment of me in both his official and private capacity.

E. R.

CORRESPONDENCE.

I.—LETTER FROM DR. RYERSON TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE WESLEYAN CONFERENCE.

(COPY.)

TORONTO, *January 2nd*, 1854.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—

I hereby resign into your hands, my membership in the Conference, and my office as a Minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church—herewith enclosing my parchments of ordination, thus taking my place among the Laity of the Church—retaining no longer any other right to the designation of *reverend*, than do those gentlemen to the designation of *honorable*, who have once been members of the Executive or Legislative Council.

I have resolved to take this step after long and serious deliberation, but without consulting any human being.

I take this step, not because I do not believe that the Wesleyan Ministry is as fully authorised as the Ministry of any other branch of the universal Church, to exercise all the functions of the Christian Priesthood; not because I do not as unfeignedly as ever subscribe to all the doctrines of the Wesleyan Church; not because I do not profoundly honor the integrity and devotedness of the Wesleyan Ministry; not because I do not think that Christian Discipline is as strictly, if not more strictly, maintained in the Wesleyan Church than in any other Christian Church in the world.

But I resign, (not my connection with, but) my ministerial office in, the Wesleyan Church, because I believe a condition of membership is exacted in it which has no warrant in Scripture, nor in the practice of the Primitive Church, nor in the writings of Mr. Wesley; and in consequence of which condition, great numbers of exemplary heads of families and young people are excluded from all

recognition and rights of membership in the Church. I refer to attendance upon class-meeting—without attendance at which no person is acknowledged as a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, however sincerely and cordially he may believe her doctrines, prefer her ministry, and support her institutions, and however exemplary he may be in his life.

I believe that class-meetings as well as love-feasts, have been and are a means of immense good in the Wesleyan Church, and that both should be employed and recommended as prudential and useful, means of religious edification to all who may be willing to avail themselves of them. But as attendance at love-feast is known to be voluntary and not to be a condition of membership in the Church; so I think that attendance at class-meeting should also be voluntary, and ought not to be exalted into an indispensable condition of membership in the Church. I am persuaded that every person who believes the doctrines, and observes the precepts and ordinances enjoined by our Lord and His Apostles, is eligible to membership in the Church of Christ, and cannot, on Scriptural or Wesleyan grounds, be excluded from its rights and privileges upon the mere ground of his or her being unable to reconcile it to their views to take a part in the conversations of class-meetings.

The views thus stated, I have entertained many years. After having revolved the subject in my mind for some time, I expressed my views on it 1840; and in 1841, the Rev. John C. Davidson assigned my remarks on this subject as one of his reasons for leaving the Canadian Conference and uniting with another branch of the Wesleyan Church. The affairs of the Church not being in a settled state during several years subsequent to 1840, I thought it inopportune to introduce the question; and as I had no pastoral charge, I endeavored to divert my mind from it. But since my more direct connection with the youth of the country at large, and having met with numbers of exemplary persons who prefer the Methodist Church to any other, but are excluded from it by the required condition of attending class-meeting, besides thousands of young people of Wesleyan parents and congregations, I have become more deeply than ever impressed with the importance of the question,—to which, you are aware, I referred in remarks made at the last and preceding Conference. I had intended until within a short time, to defer any

decision on the step I now take until the next annual Conference, and until after bringing the question in the form of distinct propositions before the Conference; but, after the best consideration in my power, I have thought it advisable to resign my office in the Church at the present time—fearing the revival and results of unpleasantnesses from my bringing the question formally before the Conference, from a conscious uncertainty as to what moment I may “cease at once to work and live,” on account of frequent and dreadful attacks in my head, and from a deep conviction that I should no longer delay taking the most effectual means in my power to draw the attention of the ministry and members of the Wesleyan Church to this anomaly in her Disciplinary regulations, and secure, if possible, to tens of thousands of persons the rights and privileges of membership in that branch of the Church of Christ which they prefer—rights and privileges to which I am persuaded they are justly entitled upon both Scriptural and Wesleyan grounds.

I do not think it is honest or right for a man to hold the office of a minister in a Church, all whose essential regulations, as well as doctrines, he cannot justify and recommend. I say *essential* regulations; for there may be many regulations and practices in a Church of which a minister may not approve, and the existence of which he may deplore, but which would not prevent him from maintaining, as usual, his relations and course of labour. An enlightened Christian mind can and will, without any compromise of principle, allow a wide latitude in modes of proceeding, and in matters of opinion, taste, and prudence. But a regulation which determines who shall and who shall not be recognised as members of the Church of Christ, involves a vital question, the importance of which cannot be overrated, and which must be determined by Divine Revelation, and not by mere conventional rules.

Now, while as an individual I may value and wish to attend, as far as possible, all prudential as well as instituted means of grace in our Church, I cannot as a teacher, by word or office, declare that all persons who will not attend class-meetings, in addition to observing all the ordinances of Christ, should be rejected and excluded from the Christian Church. I cannot say so—I cannot think so—I cannot believe it Scriptural or right, in respect to great numbers of estimable persons, and of the sons and daughters of our people, who

believe Wesleyan doctrines, who respect and love the Wesleyan ministry, support Wesleyan institutions, are exemplary in their lives, and who wish to be members of the Wesleyan Church, but who, from education, or mental constitution, or other circumstances, cannot face, much less enjoy, the developments and peculiarities of the class-meeting. I have met and sympathised with many who have sought to reconcile their views and feelings to the personal speakings and communications of class-meetings, but who could not succeed; and not being allowed otherwise to enjoy the privileges of membership in the Wesleyan Church, were driven to seek admission into some other Christian communion.

Our Lord and His Apostles have prescribed no form of religious communion but the Lord's Supper. The New Testament meetings of Christian fellowship, in which the early Christians edified one another, are appropriately adduced as the exemplars of Wesleyan *Love-feasts*—that voluntary and useful means of religious edification. But it is remarkable that a person may neither attend Love-feast nor the Lord's Supper, and yet retain his membership in the Wesleyan Church, while he is excluded from it if he does not attend class-meeting, though he may attend both the Lord's Supper and Love-feast, as well as the preaching of the word and meetings for prayer. Nay, I find in the latter part of the section of our Discipline on "Class Meetings," that the Minister in charge of a circuit is required to exclude all "those members of the Church who wilfully and repeatedly neglect to meet their class," but to state at the time of their "exclusion," "that they are laid aside for a breach of our rules of Discipline, and *not for immoral conduct*." I know of no Scriptural authority to exclude any person from the Church of Christ on earth, except for that which would exclude him from the kingdom of glory, namely "immoral conduct." But here is an express requirement for the exclusion of persons from the Wesleyan Church for that which it is admitted is not "immoral conduct," namely, neglect of class-meeting. This is certainly going beyond Scriptural authority and example.

I have said that I do not regard as Wesleyan, or having the sanction of Mr. Wesley, the making attendance at class-meeting an essential condition of membership in the church of Christ. Mr. Wesley declared that the sole object of his labours was, not to form a

new sect, but to revive religion in the church and in the nation; that each class was a voluntary society in the church, but was no more a separate church organization than a Bible Society, or Temperance Society, or Young Men's Christian Association, is a separate church organization. Nor did Mr. Wesley regard the admission of persons into, or exclusion from, any one of his societies as affecting, in the slightest degree, such person's church membership. Nay, Mr. Wesley insisted that all who joined his societies, in addition to attending class-meeting, and the ministrations of his preachers, should regularly attend the services and sacraments of the Church of England. In his sermon "on attending church service," Mr. Wesley says, "it was one of our original rules, that every member of our society should attend the church and sacrament, unless he had been bred among christians of another denomination." In his Tract, entitled "Principles of a Methodist Further Explained," (written in reply to the Rev. Mr. Church,) Mr. Wesley says, "The United Society was originally so called, because it consisted of several smaller societies united together. When any members of these, or of the United Society, are proved to live in known sin, we then mark and avoid them; we separate ourselves from every one that walks disorderly. Sometimes if the case be judged infectious, (though rarely) this is decided openly; but this you style 'excommunication.' and say, 'does not every one see a separate ecclesiastical communion?'" Mr. Wesley replies, "No. This society does not separate from the rest of the Church of England. They continue steadfast with them both in the apostolical doctrine, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." And in further reply to the charge, that in excluding disorderly persons from his society, he was usurping a power committed to the higher order of the clergy, Mr. Wesley says "No; not in the power of excluding members from a *private society*, unless on the supposition of some such rule as ours is, viz.: 'That if a man separate from the church, he is no longer a member of our society.'"

These passages (from scores of similar ones in Mr. Wesley's works), are sufficient to shew what Mr. Wesley understood and intended by admission into, or exclusion from any one of his societies—that it did not in the least affect the relations of any person to the church of which he was a member. Now, the rule

which Mr. Wesley imposed as a condition of membership in a private society in a church, we impose as a condition of membership in the church itself.

It is also worthy of remark, that attendance at class-meeting is not required of members in the *general rules of the society*—those very rules which our ministers are required to give to persons proposing to join the Wesleyan Church.

In those rules no mention is made of class-meeting, nor is it there required that each member shall meet the leader, much less meet him in a class-meeting, in the presence of many others; but that the leader shall *see* each person in his class, and *meet* the minister and stewards once a week. Yet, by constant and universal practice we have transferred the obligation from the *leader* to the *member*, and made it the duty of the latter (on pain of excommunication,) to meet the former in *class-meeting*; an obligation which is no where enjoined in the general rules. In those rules it is said, “There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies—a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.” The rules then truly state, that wherever this desire is really fixed in the soul, it will be known by its fruits. These fruits are briefly but fully set forth under three heads. (1) By doing no harm. (2) By doing good. (3) “By attending all the ordinances of God. Such, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the Supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the scriptures, and fasting or abstinence. These are the general rules of our societies, all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in His written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of faith and practice.” Now, neither class-meeting nor love-feast is mentioned among the “ordinances of God,” enumerated in the general rules of the society; nor is it mentioned in Mr. Wesley’s Large Minutes of Conference among the *instituted* means of grace. So far as the general rules themselves are concerned, there is nothing which makes attendance at class-meeting a condition of membership, even in Mr. Wesley’s societies as he originally instituted them; nor did the idea of holding class-meetings at all, occur to Mr. Wesley until after the general rules were drawn up

and published.* But what was not required by the general rules

* Note on the origin of the office of class-leader and class-meetings.

Mr. Wesley's own account of the origin of the office of class-leader and class-meetings, illustrates the accuracy of what I have stated. The office was first created at Bristol, 15th February, 1742, for financial purposes alone. A few weeks afterwards, it was instituted for religious purposes also; and for the twofold object of religion and finance, it was embodied in the General Rules, which were drawn up and signed by Mr. Wesley, 1st May, 1743; but in which there is no mention made of class-meeting, or of the duty of any member to meet in class. In his "Plain Account of the People called Methodists," Mr. Wesley thus states the origin of the office of class-leader and the institution of class-meetings:

"At length (says he,) while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have had cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the Society in Bristol [Feb. 15, 1742] concerning the means of paying the debts there; when one stood up, and said, 'Let every member of the Society give a penny a week till all are paid.' Another said, 'But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it.' 'Then,' said the other, 'put eleven of the poorest with me, and if they can give any thing, well: *I will see them weekly*; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And *each of you call upon eleven of your neighbours weekly*, receive what they give, and make up what is wanting. It was done. In a little while some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did live as he ought. It struck me immediately, This is the very thing we have wanted so long? I called together the Leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their companies,) and desired that each would make particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced in God with reverence. As soon as possible, the same method was used in London, and in all other places." The following is Mr. Wesley's account of the first appointment of class-leaders in London, extracted from his Journal, Thursday, March 25, 1742, "I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of *knowing the people* who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to *come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person*, than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, *under the inspection* of those in whom I could confide. This was the *origin of our classes* at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest." In his "Plain account of the People called Methodists," Mr. Wesley says, "At first they [the Leaders] visited each person at his own house; but this was soon found not so expedient; and that on many accounts." Mr. Wesley assigns several reasons for this change, and proceeds to answer several objections to class meetings. The following passage shows the exact ground on which Mr. Wesley based the institution of class-meetings:

soon became a condition of membership in another way—this was by the system of giving tickets. Mr. Wesley says in his plain account of the people called Methodists—“As the society increased, I found it required still greater care to separate the precious from the vile. In order to this, I determined, at least once in three months, to talk with every member myself, and to inquire at their own mouth, as well as of their leaders and neighbours, whether they grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. To each of those whose seriousness and good conversation I had no reason to doubt, I gave a testimony under my own hand, by writing their name on a ticket prepared for that purpose. Those who bore these tickets, wherever they came, were acknowledged by their brethren, and were received with all cheerfulness. These tickets also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any *disorderly* member. He has no ticket at the quarterly visitation (for so often

“Some objected, ‘There were no such meetings when I came into the society first: and why should there be now? I do not understand these things, and this changing one thing after another continually.’ It was easily answered: It is a pity but they had been from the first. But we knew not then, either the need or the benefit of them. Why we use them, you will easily understand, if you will read over the Rules of the Society. That with regard to these *little prudential helps*, we are continually changing one thing after another, is not a weakness or fault as you imagine, but is a peculiar privilege which we enjoy, By this means we declare them all to be *merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution.*”

Now, while it is proper for each person, as far as may be consistent with his circumstances and views of duty, to use every prudential means of doing and getting good, yet the observance of nothing but what is Divinely instituted should be imposed as a condition of membership in the Church of God. To make attendance at class-meeting that condition, is to require what the Lord hath not commanded, and to change essentially the character and objects of a means of good which Mr. Wesley (with whom it originated) declared to be “*merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution.*”

That Mr. Wesley conceived the basis of a church should be much more comprehensive than the rules he drew up and recommended in regard to the “*little prudential helps*” which were suggested to him from time to time, is obvious from the eighth of his twelve reasons against organising a new Church—reasons published many years after the preparation and adoption of all his society rules. His words are as follows: “Because to form the plan of a new church would require infinite time and care, with much more wisdom and greater depth and extensiveness of thought than any of us are masters of.”

the tickets are changed); and hereby it is immediately known that he is no longer of the community." It was at length required by a minute of Conference, (as our own discipline enjoins,) that a preacher should not give a ticket of membership to any person who did not meet in class. In our own discipline, in the section on class-meetings, will also be found the following question and answer :—

“ Question—What shall be done with those members of our church who wilfully and repeatedly neglect their class ?

“ Answer.—1. Let the chairman, or one of the preachers, visit them whenever it is practicable, and explain to them the consequence if they continue to neglect, viz., *exclusion*.

“ 2. If they do not attend, let him who has charge of the circuit *exclude* them, (in the church,) showing that they are laid aside for a breach of our rules of discipline, and *not for immoral conduct*.”

By this added ministerial authority and duty, a condition of membership in the society is imposed which is not contained in the General Rules, and which subjects a member to *exclusion*, for that which is acknowledged to be “ not immoral conduct.”

This appears a strange regulation in even a private religious society within a church; but no objection could be reasonably made to any such regulation in such a society, if its members desired it, and as it would not affect their church membership. But the case is essentially different, when such society in a church becomes a church, and exercises the authority of admitting into, and excluding from the church itself, and not merely a society in the church.

In England, and especially in the United States and Canada, the Wesleyan Societies have become a church. I have repeatedly shewn in past years, that they have become organized into a church upon both Wesleyan and scriptural grounds. I believe the Wesleyan Church in Canada is second to no other in the scriptural authority of its ministry and organization. Believing this, I believe that exclusion from the Wesleyan Church, (either by expulsion or refusal of admission) is exclusion from a branch of the Church of God—is an act the most solemn and eventful in the history and relations of any human being—an act which should never take place except upon the clear and express authority of the word of God.

Far be it from me to say one word other than in favour of every

kind of religious exercise and communion which tends to promote the spiritual mindedness, brotherly love and fervent zeal of professing christians. That class-meetings (notwithstanding occasional improprieties and abuses attending them,) have been a valuable means in promoting the spirituality and usefulness of the Wesleyan Church, no one acquainted with her history can for a moment doubt; and I believe that myriads on earth and in heaven have, and will ever have, reason for devout thankfulness and praise for the benefits derived from class-meetings, as well as from love-feasts and meetings for prayer. But attendance upon the two latter is voluntary on the part of the members of the Wesleyan Church; and what authority is there for suspending their very membership in the Church of God on their attendance upon the former? The celebration of the Lord's Supper, and not class-meeting, was the binding characteristic institution upon the members of the Primitive Church. So I am persuaded it should be now; and that christian faith and practice alone (and not the addition of attendance upon class-meeting,) should be the test of worthiness for its communion and privileges. While, therefore, as an individual I seek to secure and enjoy all the benefits of the faithful ministrations and scriptural ordinances of the Wesleyan Church, I cannot occupy a position which in itself, and by its duties requires me to enforce or justify the imposition of a condition of membership in the Church of Christ, which I believe is not required by the holy scriptures, and the exclusion of thousands of persons from church membership and privileges, to which I believe they have as valid a right as I have, and that upon the sole ground of their non-attendance at a meeting, the neglect of which our own discipline admits, does not involve "immoral conduct," and which Mr. Wesley himself, in his Plain Account of the People called Methodists, has declared "to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution."

It is passing strange, that while the Wesleyan Church is the avowed "friend of all and enemy of none"—is the most Catholic of any Protestant body towards other religious communions—she should close the door of admission into her own fold even to attendance upon class-meeting. I regard it as the misfortune rather than the dishonour of the Wesleyan Church, that she repels thousands that seek her communion rather than relax this term of admission.

If her success has been so great under disadvantages unparalleled, I cannot but believe, that, with the same divine blessing, and upon a basis of membership less narrow and more scriptural, the Wesleyan Church, would, beyond all precedent, increase her usefulness, and enlarge her borders.

I will not permit myself to dwell upon associations and recollections which cannot be expressed in words, any more than they can be obliterated from the memory, or effaced from the heart. Though I retire from councils in the deliberations of which I have been permitted to take a part during more than twenty-five years, and relinquish all claims upon funds to which I have contributed for a like period, I should still deem it my duty and privilege to pray for the success of the former, and continue my humble contributions to the latter; while I protest, in the most emphatic way in my power against shutting the doors of the church upon thousands to whom I believe they should be opened, and against making that essential and divine, which, as Mr. Wesley says, "is merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution." I hope the day is not remote when the Wesleyan Church will be as scriptural in her every term of membership as she is in her doctrines of grace and labours of love.

I remain, Reverend and dear Sir,

Your affectionate brother,

And faithful servant,

(Signed)

E. RYERSON.

The REV. ENOCH WOOD,

President of the Wesleyan Conference.

P.S.—It may be proper to state that the principal part of this letter was written several weeks since, but was laid aside for further consideration until now.

(Signed) E. R.

II.—REPLY TO THE FOREGOING LETTER.

(COPY)

TORONTO, *January 4th*, 1854.

REVEREND AND DEAR DOCTOR,—

To accept the enclosed documents would be assuming a responsibility at variance with my judgment and affections. If the proposal

you make of withdrawing from the Methodist ministry be ever received, it must be with the concurrence of the collective conference; or should the question require immediate attention, that of its executive committee. I shall be glad to see the enactment of any regulation which will promote the usefulness of our church to the benefit of a large and intelligent class of adherents now receiving no recognition beyond their contributions to our institutions; and also the adoption of practical measures by which the youth baptized by Wesleyan Ministers may be more personally cared for, and affiliated to our ordinances. Your distinguished ability and matured experience eminently qualify you as a safe legislator and councillor on such grave questions, which by some cannot be separated from ancient usages greatly ble-sed to the growing spirituality of true believers, without injury to the vital character of the church. After so long and useful a career, your separation from our conference and work would be a connexional calamity. You stand among the few in Canada to whom the present independent and legal position of the Wesleyan Church stands deeply indebted. Future generations of ministers and people will partake, imperceptibly to themselves, of the advantages a few of the more gifted and noble-minded brethren struggled and contended for against so many obstacles. You are as capable of remedying anything wrong, or supplying anything wanting *within* the Church, as you were many years ago, to overcome impediments to her usefulness *without*.

I am, Reverend and Dear Doctor,

Your affectionate Brother

And Fellow-labourer,

(Signed)

ENOCH WOOD.

Rev. E. RYERSON, D. D., &c., &c.

III.—COPY OF RESOLUTIONS SUBMITTED BY DR. RYERSON, AND NEGATIVED BY THE CONFERENCE— JUNE, 1854.

Resolved,—

1.—That no human authority has a right to impose any condition of membership in the visible church of Christ, which is not enjoined

by, or may be concluded from the Holy Scriptures.

2.—That the General Rules of the United Societies of the Wesleyan Methodist Church being formed upon the holy scriptures, and requiring nothing of any member which is not necessary for admission into the kingdom of grace and glory, ought to be maintained inviolate as the religious and moral standard of profession, conduct and character, in regard to all who are admitted or continued members of our church.

3.—That the power, therefore, of expelling persons from the visible Church of Christ, for other than a cause sufficient to exclude a person from the kingdom of grace and glory, which the fourth question, and answers to it, contained in the second section of the second chapter of our discipline, confer and enjoin upon our ministers, is unauthorized by the holy scriptures, is inconsistent with the scriptural rights of the members of Christ's Church, and ought not to be assumed or exercised by any minister of our church.

4.—That the anomalous question and answers referred to in the foregoing resolution, be, and are hereby expunged from our discipline and are required to be omitted in printing the next edition of it.*

IV.—LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE.

(COPY)

BELLEVILLE, *June 10th, 1854.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—

The decision of the Conference this afternoon on the scriptural rights of the members of our church and the power of our ministers in respect to them, makes it at length my painful duty to request

* NOTE.—The following are the Question and Answers referred to :—

“*Ques.* 4. What shall we do with those members of our Church who wilfully and repeatedly neglect to meet their class?

“*Ans.* 1. Let the Chairman, or one of the Preachers, visit them whenever it is practicable, and explain to them the consequence, if they continue to neglect, viz :—Exclusion.

“2. If they do not amend, let him who has the charge of the circuit, exclude them, (in the church) showing that they are laid aside for a breach of our rules of Discipline, and not for immoral conduct.”

you to lay before the Conference the letter which I addressed to you the 2nd of last January, and that you will consider that letter as now addressed to the Conference through you.

The kind and too flattering answer (dated 4th January,) which you were pleased to make to that letter, the hopes you therein expressed, and the willingness which you subsequently expressed to assume the responsibility of my retaining for the time being, my official position in the Conference after so explicit an avowal of my convictions, induced me to defer any further action on the subject until the Conference. I have done so, and have, after due notice, brought the subject before the Conference; but the hopes which you expressed in your letter of the 4th January, have, in no respect, been realized. I am, however, thankful that the discussion of the subject has terminated without any asperity or unkindness of feeling on either side.

I trust you and the Conference will do me the justice to allow the publication of the Resolutions which I have proposed and the correspondence which has taken place between us on this subject, that my views and conduct may not be misapprehended by that large religious community among whom I have labored nearly thirty years, and with whom I hope, as ever, to be connected.

I herewith again enclose you my parchments of ordination. I purpose to do all in my power to promote those important measures in regard to the college and means for the regular training of received candidates for the ministry which have been recommended by the Conference. I cannot attempt to add anything more to what is contained in my letter of the 2nd January, expressive of what I feel on the present occasion, except to say that, although I gave no intimation during the discussion of the result of the decision on this subject upon my own official relations to the Conference, I retire from it with feelings of undiminished respect and affection for my Reverend Brethren, and my earnest prayer for their welfare and usefulness.

I remain, Reverend and dear Sir,

Your faithful Servant and Brother,

(Signed) E. RYERSON.

THE REVEREND ENOCH WOOD,
President of the Conference.

V.—REPLY TO THE FOREGOING LETTER.

(COPY.)

REV. AND DEAR DOCTOR,—

The purpose you aim to accomplish can be effectually secured by a different resolution to that introduced yesterday ; if you will stay and hear what the brethren may say about the appointment of a large committee to take up this subject before I lay your resignation before them, I shall feel much gratified. I again say, I look upon your proposed withdrawal with deep sorrow, and must say, I cannot bring myself to believe that on such grounds you can be justified in taking so serious a step.

If the separation cannot be avoided, you will be kind enough to send the letter referred to, as you remember I handed it to you since coming to Belleville. Again, I entreat you, my dear friend, to withdraw your resignation. Excuse this scrawl, as I write in the midst of Conference business.

Very respectfully,

And affectionately yours,

(Signed,)

ENOCH WOOD.

REV. DR. RYERSON.

P. S.—I find I have the letter ; but would still wish you would attend and hear what the Conference may say.

(Signed,)

E. W.

June 10th, 1854.

VI.—LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE.

(COPY)

MONDAY MORNING,

BELLEVILLE, *June 12th, 1854.*

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,—

In accordance with the request contained in your affectionate note of Saturday, I attended the Conference, instead of pressing the reading to it of the letter which I had addressed to you on Saturday

morning. I listened with delight and hope to the observations and recommendations which you made. I anticipated happy results from the appointment of the very large committee which you nominated, and which might be considered as representing the sentiments and feelings of the Conference. But from the lengthened meeting of that committee, in the evening, it was clear that no disposition existed to modify the power of ministers to expel persons from the Church for non-attendance at a meeting which, in the 12th section, chapter 1st, p. 47, of our own Discipline, taken from the writings of Mr. Wesley, is declared to be "prudential," even among Methodists—that thus the highest and most awful penalty that the Church can inflict—a penalty analagous to capital punishment in the administration of civil law—is to be executed upon members of the Church for the omission of what our own Discipline does not exalt to the rank of a "prudential" means of grace among Christians,—only among Methodists.

2. It was also clear that views of baptism prevailed (I cannot say how widely) at variance with the 17th Article of Faith in our Discipline,* and altogether opposite to those set forth by Mr. Wesley in his sermons and in his Treatise on Baptism.

3. But that for which I was not prepared, (which I supposed to have been settled, and which I therefore assumed,) was the obviously prevalent opinion against the church membership of children baptized by our ministry. It will be recollected that I had not proposed any other condition or mode of admitting persons into our Church from without, than that which already exists amongst us; but I urged in behalf of both parents and children, the practical recognition of the rights and claims of children who were admitted and acknowledged as members of the Church by baptism, as implied in our Form of Baptism, and according to our Catechism, and according to what the Conference unanimously declared at Hamilton, in 1853, our church holds to be among the privileges of baptized persons,—namely, that "they are made members of the visible Church of

* The following is the Article of Faith referred to :—

"XVII. *Of Baptism.* Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized, but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church."

Christ." Persons cannot, of course, be members of the "*visible*" Church of Christ, without being members of some *visible* branch or section of it; and it is not pretended that children baptized by our ministry are members of any other *visible* portion of the Church of Christ than the Wesleyan. To deny, therefore, that the baptized children of our people are members of our Church, and that they should be acknowledged as such, and as such be impressed with their obligations and privileges, and as such be prepared for, and brought into, the spiritual communion and fellowship of the Church, on coming to the years of accountability, is, it appears to me, to make the Sacrament of Baptism a nullity, and to disfranchise thousands of children of divinely chartered rights and privileges. Mr. Wesley, in his Treatise on Baptism, in stating the third benefit of baptism, remarks—"By baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its Head. The Jews were admitted into the Church by circumcision, so are the Christians by baptism." Then Mr. Wesley, speaking of the proper subjects of baptism, says—

"If infants are capable of making a covenant, and were and still are under the evangelical covenant, then they have a right to baptism, which is the entering seal thereof. But infants are capable of making a covenant, and were and still are under the evangelical covenant.

"The custom of nations and common reason of mankind prove that infants may enter into a covenant, and may be obliged by compacts made by others in their name, and receive advantage by them. But we have stronger proof than this, even God's own word: "Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord,—your captains, with all the men of Israel; your little ones, your wives and the stranger,—that thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God," Deut. xxix, 10–12. Now, God would never have made a covenant with little ones, if they had not been capable of it. It is not said children only, but little children, the Hebrew word properly signifying infants. And these may be still, as they were of old, obliged to perform, in aftertime, what they are not capable of performing at the time of their entering into that obligation.

"The infants of believers, the true children of faithful Abraham, always were under the Gospel covenant. They were included in it, they had a right to it and to the seal of it; as an infant heir has a right to his estate, though he cannot yet have actual possession."—Vol. x, English Edition, pp. 193, 194. Vol. vi, American Edition, pp. 16, 17.

Again, Mr. Wesley's third argument on this subject is so clear, so touching, and so conclusive, that I will quote it without abridgement, as follows :—

“If infants ought to come to Christ, if they are capable of admission into the Church of God, and consequently of solemn sacramental dedication to him, then they are proper subjects of baptism. But infants are capable of coming to Christ, of admission into the Church, and solemn dedication to God.

“That infants ought to come to Christ, appears from his own words : ‘They brought little children to Christ, and the disciples rebuked them. And Jesus said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven,’ Matt. xix, 13, 14. St. Luke expresses it still more strongly : ‘They brought unto him even infants, that he might touch them,’ xviii, 15. These children were so little, that they were *brought* to him ; yet he says, ‘Suffer them to *come* unto me :’ so little, that he ‘took them up in his arms ;’ yet he rebukes those who would have hindered their coming to him. And his command respected the future as well as the present. Therefore his disciples or ministers are still to suffer infants to come, that is, to be brought, unto Christ. But they cannot now come to him, unless by being brought into the Church ; which cannot be but by baptism. Yea, and ‘of such,’ says our Lord, ‘is the kingdom of heaven ;’ not of such only as were like these infants. For if they themselves were not fit to be subjects of that kingdom, how could others be so, because they were like them ? Infants, therefore, are capable of being admitted into the Church, and have a right thereto. Even under the Old Testament they were admitted into it by circumcision. And can we suppose they are in a worse condition under the Gospel, than they were under the law ? and that our Lord would take away any privileges which they then enjoyed ? Would he not rather make additions to them ? This, then is a third ground. Infants ought to come to Christ, and no man ought to forbid them. They are capable of admission into the Church of God. Therefore, they are proper subjects of baptism.”—Vol. x., English Edition, pp. 195, 196. Vol. vi., American Edition pp. 17, 18.

Upon these Wesleyan and Scriptural grounds, I believe that the promise and privileges of membership in the Church belong to the baptized children of our people as well as to their parents ; that the parents have a right to claim this relationship and its privileges for their children until such children are excluded from the Church by the lawful acts of its executive authorities. Otherwise, the youth baptized by our ministry are in the most pitiful and degrading religious position of the youth of any Church that recognizes the doc-

trine of infant baptism ; and it appears to me that we ought rather not to baptize infants at all, or recommend their parents to take them to other churches for baptism, than thus to treat the feelings of such parents, and to regard their children as having no more membership and privileges in our Church than the rest of the youth of the land, or even the world at large.

It is happily true, that many of the children of our people, as well as those of other people, are converted and brought into the Church under the faithful ministrations of the Word ; but how many ten thousand more of them would never wander from the Church, would more easily and more certainly be led to experience all the power of inward religion and the blessings of Christian fellowship, were they acknowledged in their true position and rights, and taught the significance, and obligation, and privilege of all that the outward ordinances and their visible relations involved were intended to confer. It ought to make a Christian heart bleed to think that our largest increase of members, according to returns over which we are disposed to congratulate ourselves, falls vastly short of the natural increase of population in our own community, apart from the increase of the population of the country at large, and therefore that perhaps five or more persons are sent out into the world, as worldlings, from the families of our Church, while one is retained or brought into it from the world by all our ministrations and agencies. The prophets did not deny to a Jew his membership in the Jewish Church, in order to make him a Jew inwardly. Mr. Wesley did not un-church the tens of thousands of baptized members of the Church of England to whom he successfully preached salvation by faith : he made their state, and duties, and privileges, as baptized members of the Church of Christ, the grounds of his appeals ; and this vantage ground was one great means of his wonderful success.

But I will not enlarge. I will only add, that as in former years, I, with others, maintained what we believed to be the rights of Canada and of our Canadian Church against pretensions which have long since been withdrawn, and the erroneous information and impressions connected with which have long since been removed ; so, I now feel it my duty to do what I can to secure and maintain the Scriptural and Wesleyan rights of members of our Church against

the exercise of ministerial authority which has no warrant in Scripture nor in the writings of Mr. Wesley; and I feel myself specially called upon by my position in respect to the youth of the country, as well as by my strong convictions, to claim and insist upon the Scriptural and Wesleyan rights of church membership in behalf of the many thousands of children baptized by our ministry—believing upon both Scriptural and Wesleyan grounds, it is due to such children and to their parents.

Under such circumstances, I have no other alternative than to request you again to lay before the Conference the correspondence which has taken place between us on these subjects.

Of your personal courtesy and kindness towards me, I shall ever retain a grateful recollection.

I have no object in view, beyond what is avowed in this correspondence. If I have had any personal ambition, it has been more than satisfied both in the Church and in the country at large. I have nothing more to seek or desire, than to employ the short and uncertain time that remains to me in striving to become more and more meet for the intercourse of the saints in light, to mature and promote for my native country the great educational system in which I am engaged, and to secure to all members of our Church, and to all parents and children baptized into it, what I am persuaded are the sacred rights and privileges. I am satisfied that Scriptural and Wesleyan truth will, as heretofore, prevail, and that the Conference and the Church will yet rejoice in it, however it may, for the moment, be clouded by error and misrepresentation, or impeded by personal feelings, groundless fears, or mistaken prejudice.

Believe me, Reverend and dear Sir,

Your faithful friend and servant,

(Signed)

E. RYERSON.

The Reverend ENOCH WOOD,

President of the Conference.

JAN. 6/31

